

Netherlands bans poultry transport after discovering bird flu (Update)

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Dutch officials on Sunday banned the transport of poultry in the Netherlands after the discovery of a highly infectious strain of bird flu which could jump to humans.

The "highly pathogenic" form of avian influenza discovered at a farm in the centre of the country is very dangerous to birds and "contamination can occur from animals to humans," the Dutch government said in a statement.

About 150,000 chickens at the farm in Hekendorp are to be destroyed by Dutch health authorities, which for the moment have not identified the exact strain of flu.

Avian influenza is fatal for chickens, and poses a health threat to humans, who can become sickened by handling infected poultry.

The H5N1 strain of bird flu has killed more than 400 people, mainly in Southeast Asia, since first appearing in 2003. Another strain of bird flu, H7N9, has claimed more than 170 lives since emerging in 2013.

The Dutch transport ban is to last a maximum of 72 hours and includes moving poultry, eggs and bird manure.

However, in a 10-kilometre (six mile) ring around the affected farm the ban could last up to 30 days.

The authorities were to perform testing at 16 other farms in the area and new restrictions were being set up for visitors.

Hunting has also been banned for now across the country.

According to Dutch media, the H7N7 strain of avian flu severely hit the Netherlands in 2003 with health authorities destroying some 30 million birds in an effort to quash an outbreak.

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